

Marc Roby: We are beginning our third year of this podcast by resuming our study of biblical anthropology. Dr. Spencer, at the end of the last session, you said that we could define soul, or spirit, as the immaterial part of man, which includes the essence of who he is, and which lives on after his physical death, and has as essential attributes the faculties of reason, morality and free will.

Dr. Spencer: That's correct.

Marc Roby: If we use this definition, what would say about the higher animals. Do they have a soul?

Dr. Spencer: I would have to say that I don't know for sure. It may be that there is no immaterial part to animals, which would require that their abilities to reason are very limited and that they are not truly capable of making real, free-will decisions. Whatever "decisions" they do make would then have to be comparable to "decisions" made by a very complicated machine. They are entirely determined by the nature of the machine. But I find that idea a bit hard to swallow given animals I have known well in my life.

Marc Roby: They do have personalities, and it is hard to think of them as being just biological machines.

Dr. Spencer: I agree completely. And so, I'm certainly open to the possibility that there is some immaterial aspect to the higher animals, but the Bible simply doesn't tell us. If there is, then perhaps you could call it a soul or spirit, but it would be of an entirely different nature than our spirit because it is not made in the image of God and is not capable of fellowship with God. The Bible is clear on that much.

Marc Roby: And so, at the end of the day, that is the most important thing about our nature. We are made in the image of God and are able to have fellowship with him.

Dr. Spencer: That is absolutely the most important thing, yes.

Marc Roby: There is one other question about higher animals that I find intriguing, although obviously not of critical importance. Are they morally accountable? In other words, do they know the difference between right and wrong and will they in any way be held to account for their actions?

Dr. Spencer: Well, the animals I've owned certainly seemed to know when they had done something wrong! But I only know of one Bible verse that speaks to the issue, although I'm open to having our listeners point out others. In Genesis 9 we read about God's blessing Noah and his family after the flood was over. In Verse 5 God says to them, "And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man."<sup>1</sup>

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**Marc Roby: Now that's very interesting. God will demand an accounting from every animal.**

Dr. Spencer: Now I haven't studied this verse, and this may just be a way for God to make clear how sacred human life is, but it is possible that it literally means animals will be called to account in some way as well. There are obvious problems with that view though. First, does that mean that animals go on living in some sense too? There is no indication of that that I know of in the Bible. And second, there is no distinction here between higher and lower forms of animal life. What if someone dies from a spider bite? I simply cannot believe that spiders make moral choices and will be held accountable. At the end of the day, I think we simply have to say that we don't know.

**Marc Roby: Is there anything else you would like to say about dichotomy and trichotomy, or the soul and spirit?**

Dr. Spencer: I'd like to point out the obvious fact, which we have noted before, that the word spirit gets used in different ways and those who believe in dichotomy sometimes use the word in a way that is more consistent with trichotomy.

For example, when we say that an unbeliever is spiritually dead, we don't mean that the immaterial part of the person has ceased to exist or function. If that were the case, the whole person would be dead as we have noted. I don't think this causes any great difficulty for most people, but it is worth pointing out.

**Marc Very well. But before we wrap up our discussion of dichotomy and trichotomy, there is one passage relating to men and animals that we didn't examine, but which I think it would be good for us to comment on because it speaks about the spirits of animals as well as men.**

Dr. Spencer: What passage do you have in mind?

**Marc Roby: In Ecclesiastes 3:19-21 we read the following: "Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?" Now, what would you say about those verses?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, first of all, we need to recognize that they come from the book of Ecclesiastes, which relates to us the attempt of a man, called the Teacher, most likely Solomon, to understand the meaning of life in the face of life's trials and troubles and the fact that everyone dies, no matter how good or noble the person is. In much of the book he examines the questions from what appears to be a purely materialistic point of view.

I like what J. Vernon McGee said about this book, he first noted that Solomon also wrote the book of Proverbs and then wrote that “In Proverbs we saw the *wisdom* of Solomon; here [in Ecclesiastes] we ... see the *foolishness* of Solomon.”<sup>2</sup>

**Marc Roby: That statement brings to mind 1 Corinthians 1. In Verse 20 Paul wrote, “Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”**

Dr. Spencer: That fits Ecclesiastes perfectly, although in the end the Teacher does conclude that you need God to make sense out of life. In fact, in the Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible it says that “Ecclesiastes is really intended to be a tract for the conversion of the self-sufficient intellectual”.<sup>3</sup>

**Marc Roby: I’m sure the book has other uses, but I do like that statement. Human beings should never think of themselves as self-sufficient.**

Dr. Spencer: No, we shouldn’t. But, returning to the verses you read. Solomon is relating to us his own thoughts here, as he tells us in Verse 18. And, while this biblical account of Solomon’s thinking is infallible, his thinking was not. In other words, you don’t want to build any doctrine from these statements.

If you read the whole book you get the point clearly. Thinking about the meaning of life apart from God leads to vanity, or meaninglessness. In these verses Solomon is allowing his thoughts to roam; he is considering the fact that all men, like animals, die. And when he speaks about the “spirit of the animal”, I take it to simply mean the life of the animal as opposed to the physical body.

**Marc Roby: Which again illustrates the fact that the words soul and spirit have a wide range of usage.**

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely, and it also illustrates that we need to be very careful with our biblical hermeneutics.

**Marc Roby: Are we finished then with our discussion of dichotomy and trichotomy?**

Dr. Spencer: I think we are.

**Marc Roby: What are we going to look at next?**

Dr. Spencer: We are going to look at what is the most important aspect of human nature since the fall; which is our sin.

**Marc Roby: Why do you say it is the most important aspect of our nature?**

Dr. Spencer: Because sin is the cause of all of the trouble we experience in life, including death itself, and it is the cause of our being under the wrath of God and needing a Savior. If our sin is

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<sup>2</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982, Vol. III, pg. 105

<sup>3</sup> Zondervan, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 1976, Vol. 2, pg. 188

not dealt with, our eternal destiny is hell. But if our sins are forgiven, our eternal destiny is heaven.

**Marc Roby: I certainly can't think of anything that comes even close to that in importance.**

Dr. Spencer: Nor can I, because there isn't anything that comes even close. Jesus himself said that there is only one thing needful in this life<sup>4</sup>, and that one thing is to come to a saving knowledge of Christ, which is how our sin can be dealt with. We also read in Mark 8:36 that Jesus asked his disciples the rhetorical question, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"

**Marc Roby: And the obvious answer to this question is, it does him no good at all since the soul lives on after the body dies, and our eternal state is, literally, infinitely longer than our time in this life. Therefore, even if someone truly became the ruler of the whole world and had all of the world's riches at his disposal, if that cost his immortal soul it would, in fact, be the worst possible thing.**

Dr. Spencer: It is unimaginably bad in fact. We, as finite human beings, have a serious problem in understanding eternal issues. We simply cannot grasp eternity. It is something we have to work at very hard.

**Marc Roby: I'm always reminded of that fact when we sing the hymn Amazing Grace. The last verse speaks about heaven and says, "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we've first begun."<sup>5</sup>**

Dr. Spencer: That blows your mind. But that lyric is not just poetic, it is mathematically true. The Bible tells us we will spend all eternity in heaven with God. That is infinitely long. It never ends. And so when we've been there ten thousand years, we have, quite literally, been there zero percent of the time we will be there!

**Marc Roby: And the same is true for those miserable souls who reject God's offer of salvation and find themselves in eternal hell.**

Dr. Spencer: That is, most regrettably for them, true. It isn't a popular topic in this day and age, but it is true nonetheless. And so, the topic of human sin is extremely important. If we don't properly understand our problem, we cannot properly understand the cure.

**Marc Roby: A proper diagnosis is essential to getting the right cure even when dealing with physical ailments.**

Dr. Spencer: I think that's obvious to everyone. If I have a serious skin cancer and my doctor misdiagnoses it as a harmless rash, I'm not going to get the proper treatment and I am likely to die as a result. So, a proper diagnosis is critically important.

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<sup>4</sup> See Luke 10:42

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from: Trinity Hymnal, Revised Edition, Great Commission Publications, 1990, Hymn 460

In the same way, if we misunderstand the true nature and extent of our sin problem, we will not take advantage of the only cure available. We may be satisfied with some other supposed cure, which won't really take care of our problem and will lead us to eternal hell.

**Marc Roby: And the nature of human sin has been a constant source of heresies since the beginning of the church.**

Dr. Spencer: It certainly has. It was the fundamental issue that divided Saint Augustine and Pelagius in the early fifth century. It was the central issue that divided Luther and Erasmus in the sixteenth century, it was central to the reformation of the sixteenth century, it was at the core of the controversy between Arminians and the reformed church in the early seventeenth century, and it is still a common point of contention today.

**Marc Roby: How do you want to approach this topic of sin?**

Dr. Spencer: I want to begin by spelling out as clearly as I can the biblical doctrine. There are three main components to the doctrine of sin. The first is the cause of sin, the second is the nature of sin, and the third is the definition of sin.

**Marc Roby: Alright, what do you want to say about the cause of sin?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, first of all, let's look at what God said when he finished his creative work. We read in Genesis 1:31 that "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." In other words, there was no sin in the original creation. Therefore, we must say that when God finished creating this universe, it was entirely good. God is not the author of sin.

But, at some point, Satan, who was an angel, became proud and tried to usurp God's authority. As a result, he was cast down and a number of other angels who had followed him were also cast down. The Bible tells us very little about this and I want to stay focused on anthropology for now, so I'm not going to say any more about it at this time.

**Marc Roby: There is great mystery involved in Satan's fall. How could a perfect being in perfect fellowship with God become wicked and rebel?**

Dr. Spencer: That is an unanswerable question I think, but it happened. And, after Satan fell, he became God's enemy and came and attacked God's greatest creation, man. He attacked man by tempting him to also sin by desiring to be god. And, tragically, Satan succeeded. Adam and Eve sinned. And, when they sinned, they died, just as God said they would. They died in all three senses of the term as we noted in our last session: spiritually, physically and they became subject to eternal death.

**Marc Roby: And to be explicit in remembering what we covered last time, by spiritual death we mean that they were separated from fellowship with God, by physical death we mean that they immediately started the process of physically dying, which culminates in the temporary separation of our body and spirit, and by eternal death we mean that they came under God's wrath and, had he not saved them, would have been separated from God's blessings in eternal hell.**

Dr. Spencer: That's all true.

**Marc Roby: And the first thing they did after sinning was to try and clothe themselves and then to hide from God.**

Dr. Spencer: Sin always brings guilt and shame and causes us to want to hide from God, who is holy and just.

But the tragedy is much deeper than just Adam and Eve becoming sinners, because when Adam sinned, he did so as the representative of all mankind. When he died in the three senses we just spoke about, his nature changed. We noted last time that Paul wrote in Colossians 1:21 that unbelievers are alienated from God and are enemies in their minds because of their evil behavior. In other words, Adam's sin caused him to have a sinful nature. And everyone who is descended from him by the ordinary means of reproduction inherits that sinful nature. This is the doctrine of original sin.

**Marc Roby: And that doctrine is repulsive to natural man and has itself been the cause of a number of controversies.**

Dr. Spencer: Oh, it has definitely been the cause of a number of controversies. But the biblical teaching about it is quite clear as we will see. The controversy only arises because man, in rebellion against God, refuses to accept God's testimony about what happened.

**Marc Roby: I look forward to hearing about this, but we are nearly out of time for today, so this is probably a good place to stop. Let me take this opportunity to remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org), and we'll do our best to respond.**